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PARENTAL RESPONSIBILITY.

BY MRS. ARMITAGE.

I DO not propose in this paper to decide the limits of Parental Responsibility. It is sufficient that all Christian parents feel an amount of responsibility for what their children are and will be, enough to crush them to despair with its weight, if they had nothing but their own wisdom and watchfulness to rely upon. And it is to Christian parents that I am speaking, to those who believe in a covenant of God with man. The two simple Sacraments which most Protestant Churches observe are witnesses to that covenant: the Lord's Supper to the individual's share in the free gift of divine life, and Baptism to the reception of the family into the same Godward course of development. "The promise is unto you and to your children." The God who "set men in families" has His special grace for the family as well as for the individual.

The first necessity for earnest Christian parents is to embrace this covenant of God, and believe that if man is called to be a fellow-worker with God, God will work with him. It requires a robust faith like this to meet the facts which confront us in every child's character. The facts of heredity rain difficulties to which Faith alone has the key. Mr. Galton, in one of his anthropological essays, discusses the comparative influences of Nature and Nurture. Acknowledging the persistence of moral impressions made in childhood, he doubts the common deduction from it, the deduction which is expressed in the saying of the Jesuits: "Give me the first seven years of a child's life, and I will give you the rest." A child, he points out, inherits not only from its parents, but from its grandparents, and its great-grandparents, and even from remoter ancestors. So that a child is truly a harp of a thousand strings, and as in the earlier years of its life it is chiefly taught by its parents, they evoke the inherited dispositions which are like their own, so that Nature and Nurture really work together in early childhood, to

reproduce the parents' character and tendencies in the child. Mr. Galton's lesson, of course, is that the inherited tendencies of a child's character are the permanent ones. "The foster-mother's instructions are soon sponged away; the cuckoo never learns new songs." That is all that Science can say to help us in this strait. Yet observe that Science (as ever) is in no real contradiction with Faith. In the first place, if there are such a multitude of inherited fibres of tendency from so many quarters in a child's soul, a Christian parent who seeks to evoke the noblest ones and leave the others dormant, may well believe that he is working with God. And in the second place, the Christian parent believes that under all the stern or benignant facts of physical and mental heritage, there is the eternal fact of the child's inheritance from the Father in whose image he was created. This belief, which is the sure ground of hope in Christian missions, is likewise the parents' sheet-anchor. We believe that in every soul which is human there is the possibility of response to that which is divine. We may see no evidence of this potentiality, but we must appeal to it in the confident belief that it is there. Only in the faith that God hath chosen the things which are not (to human eyes) to bring to nought the things which are, can we believe that He can work in our children, as in every child of man, the great miracle of the new birth.

First of all, then, parents must believe in themselves as instruments of the divine purpose. This must be laid upon their souls, that God has committed to them the salvation of their children—to *them*, in the first place, however useful others may be. All hangs on our faith in the divine plan, and the divine anointing for the fulfilling of that plan. This delivers from restlessness while it stimulates to obedience. This explains why those souls who led the simplest life of faith and prayer have been the most successful in the Christian training of their children. They lived in a spiritual atmosphere which became the vital air of their children.

But this brings us back with tenfold force to the importance of what we as parents *are*, beyond all our teachings to our children. Whether as the sources of their inherited qualities, or the developing influence of their early years, it is what we *are* which is of decisive weight. Surely God does indeed put us to school, when He gives us children. Surely those who have such a

divine hope set before them as the bringing of their children to God, should consecrate themselves as for the most solemn priesthood which God can give to man. It is by no casual fits of aspiration that we can hope to mould our children's souls; the purpose of our lives must be steadily and consistently devoted to it. Our desires for them must be purified; and this implies that we should be constantly bringing those desires to the altar of sacrifice, offering up the vain and poor ambitions, the worldly desires, the selfish hopes, which we too frequently cherish for our children, and thus having our eyes purged to discern the purpose of God for them, His concern in the unfolding of their souls towards Himself. Children are quick to perceive the real bent of their parents' minds, and no amount of religious observances prevents them from finding out what things their parents value most, on what their hopes for their children are really set. Nay, we may go further, and say, that in spite of the ready response which is generally to be found in the young to all that is generous and chivalrous, there are also in most young people seeds of worldliness and caste-feeling and self-indulgence, which only wait for the tacit encouragement given by the parents' example to spring into luxuriant growth.

And there is another aspect from which we may consider the supreme importance of the reality of the religious life of parents—namely, the divine use of opportunity in the religious education of children. Far more important than systematic religious instruction or any kind of religious mechanism with which we may surround our children, is the power, the God-given power, of saying the right word at the right time; of discerning the crises in a child's soul, those momentous times when repentance for some fault, or the entrance of some new aspiration, some generous expansion, or some questioning after the unseen, enlarges its moral vision. Then to be able, with the wisdom of love, with the firmness and certainty of one to whom the plan of God is a reality, to use that opportunity as a means of setting the child's feet on the next rung of the upward ladder—this is the gift of God which a true parent will most fervently desire. God does not fail to give us these opportunities in the education of our children. Fearfully are they misused sometimes, and the moment of moral awakening, misunderstood by the parent, becomes the occasion of a widening rift between parent and child. But the way in which we act in times of crisis depends on what we habitually

are. The parents who are waiting upon God in prayer, ever seeking His purpose for the child, will be able to use these divine opportunities. If, then, we have never sought for our own sakes the fellowship of the Holy Ghost, shall we not seek it for our children's sakes, that our eyes may be opened to know those moments when the angels of God descend to stir the silent pools?

Religion is not a science but an art, the divine art of a holy life. But all real art is something much more than merely imitative. Almost any one can be taught to copy a picture, but only the true artist can *make* a picture, because he alone has the eye of truth which shows him what is the important and what the unimportant in the landscape or the figure before him, so that he chooses the vital and rejects the trivial, and thus makes a picture and not a map of his subject; and he alone has the hand of truth which can make the right forms and the right colours live on the canvas. Now what genius is to the artist, the Holy Ghost is to us, who are pupils in the school of Christ. Not by mechanical imitation must we follow Him, nor teach our children to follow Him, but (in the words of Savonarola) by inward and divine inspiration. But the difference between this Holy Spirit and the genius of the artist is that it is transmissible. We are made to be channels of the Holy Ghost to one another. We have not to look at our children as the teacher of drawing looks at his class, with the despairing sense that some of them have no artistic fibre in them, and can never by any amount of pains be trained into artists. The Holy Ghost is given to all them that believe; the promise is to us and to our children; and in proportion as we grasp this truth for ourselves we shall be able to grasp it for our children, and to believe that God, who by His marvellous working sustains their bodily life and builds up their bodily frames, will also give them the eye of truth to know His will, and the will of truth to perform it.

But there is no royal road to any art. It is sometimes said that genius is an infinite capacity for taking pains; it would be truer to say that genius has the love which makes all pains easy. This is the supreme problem of every kind of education, how to awaken the love of that which is truly worthy of love. If we want a child to be a musician, we send him to a teacher who is not only a master of the technical part of his art, but who is also

full of the love of music, and can so infect him with that love that he will cheerfully submit to the drudgery of hard work, without which no art can be mastered. So we cannot make for our children any royal road to the kingdom of God. We cannot abridge for them the pains, the toil, the self-sacrifice, with which the art of the divine life must be sought; we must not try to abridge them. But if our own hearts are full of the love of that kingdom, we can with God's help infect our children with it, and thus teach them to count all toil and effort light for the prize that is set before them. Love is born of love; the end of religious education is love, and the means is love. But love in its very essence implies self-sacrifice; it scorns delight, and lives laborious days; and to this discipline for love's sake we must inure our children. We must bring them up in an atmosphere of simplicity and service, and early train them to treat Pleasure as a servant, so that she may never become their mistress. And it is only by having the ideal ever before us, as the constant object of our prayers and purposes, that we can hope to plant their feet in the realm of reality.

Finally, if we wish to keep our children in the fellowship of the Christian Church, it is in our homes that we must teach them that spiritual idea of the worship and work of the Church, which will deliver them from regarding the "means of grace" as a means of self-pleasing. We must teach them that the spirit of worship is the spirit of sacrifice, and that each of us has to bring a victim to the altar before the fire of God can descend upon it. We must train them to understand that the Church lives not for herself, but that every individual congregation is part of the great army of God, deeply implicated in His battles everywhere, whether against national sins, such as intemperance, or against heathenism in our towns and villages, and in the great world outside. A large idea of the kingdom of God, a wide sympathy with its work, will help to keep them true to the cause of God when they have to tread that winepress of fermenting thought from which we neither can nor ought to hope to preserve them.

HOW TO GIVE RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION.

BY MISS AGNES MASON.

I AM going to speak, to-day, of religious *instruction*, not of religious *influence*, which is what we are in ourselves; and not of *what* to teach, but of *how* to teach. This last limitation will, I think, keep us clear of the difficulties of Biblical criticism.

In giving religious instruction to children up to the age of twelve years, three conditions are necessary, if the teaching is to be of any permanent value.

It must be interesting, definite, and spiritual.

The Jesuits, who are such good teachers, recognise in their schools the difficulty and importance of teaching very young children; and it is said that their teachers are promoted downwards, that the least experienced master is given an advanced and disciplined class, and when he is able to manage and instruct it, he is promoted to a class where the children are less orderly and advanced, and so on downwards until he is at the top of his profession, teaching the youngest class. And they say, I believe, that if they can have a child to teach till he is seven years old, they do not care who has him afterwards, for all the most important lasting work is done.

But if we recognise that it is difficult to teach little children, we are on the way to success.

All of us have not, of course, a "gift for teaching," which is as real a thing as a "gift for preaching." But any one who tries in the right way can become a fairly successful teacher. Though no rules for teaching can be given, yet it does help us when we grasp and apply true principles of teaching; and those who can make the history of the Greeks and Romans a delight to their children can, if they try, make the history of the Jews equally attractive. But let us consider our first principle.

(1) Teaching must be interesting.

We shall not find it so hard to fulfil if we remember that a child is inferior to a full-grown man, not so much in intelligence as in